

California Crime Laboratory Review Task Force  
Laboratory Visit Interview

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In this interview, we're asking you to think big, and offer suggestions and ideas that may be completely incompatible with your actual institutional constraints and organizational beaurocracy. That being said, the purpose of the Task Force is to make recommendations as to how best to configure, fund, and improve the delivery of state and local crime laboratory services in the future. It's a big set of topics, but if you had center stage for five minutes in front of the State's policymakers, what would you focus on to improve forensic science services in your laboratory, your jurisdiction, and the State?

Are there inefficiencies in our current crime lab system that could be corrected without spending more money? What are they? How could they be fixed?

What factors come to mind as the key elements that hinder your lab's ability to meet the expectations of its client agencies?

Are those expectations realistic, or should they be adjusted in some way? Describe?

How would your lab's operations be different if you were able to implement a fully-funded budget every year?

How would your lab's operations be different if you were fully staffed?

What are your views, if any, about consolidating laboratories (either inside jurisdictions, or regionally, or statewide) to maximize efficiency? Benefits? Drawbacks?

How about re-assigning laboratory functions by forensic discipline (e.g., all ballistics in county done by PD lab, all trace evidence done by SO lab)?

In a perfect world, what would your laboratory's human resources situation look like? (E.g., steady stream or qualified criminalist applicants [qualified how?]; little turnover, etc.)

What factors account for the current deviations from this ideal?

What inefficiencies in your human resources situation are most glaring? (E.g., need to train and supervise inexperienced criminalists)? Do you see any solution?

Describe university-level and caseworker training/education resources and opportunities that would enhance or do enhance your ability to employ qualified criminalists.

One of the issues the Task Force is exploring is the role that California's State Universities and the University of California should play in assisting and improving forensic science. We would like to hear your opinion on how well California's state universities are doing, and what they might do better.

Are California's state universities doing a good job of preparing undergraduate (baccalaureate) students for careers in forensic science? If not, what could they do better?

For entry-level positions, would you prefer to hire someone who has a degree in forensic science or someone with a degree in a traditional academic discipline like biology or chemistry?

Are California's state universities doing a good job of preparing graduate (masters and doctoral) students for careers in forensic science? If not, what could they do better?

What, if anything, do you the California's state universities should be doing in the area of continuing education for crime laboratory employees? Would you like to see the University of California or California State Universities offer specialized courses or continuing education programs for crime laboratory employees? If so, what types of courses or programs would be most helpful?

What, if anything, would you like to see California's state universities do in the area of basic research on forensic science? For example, would you like to see the universities work on validation of particular methods or on development of new methods? If so, what areas (or topics) are most in need of further study? Should the government be funding more university research in the field of forensic science?

In some jurisdictions, crime scene investigation is handled by personnel within the crime laboratory, in other jurisdictions, crime scene investigation is handled by other agencies, which then forward evidence to the laboratory? Do you have an opinion on which approach is preferable?

In some jurisdictions latent print examinations are handled by the crime laboratory; in other jurisdictions, latent print examinations are handled by other agencies. Do you have an opinion on which approach is preferable?  
Workload Issues

Do you have any formal written policy regarding workload prioritization?

Are there workload issues in your lab that are not being addressed? If so, what are they?

Do outside agencies ever affect how you prioritize your workload? If so, how, and what effect does it have on lab operations?

Do you see any solutions to government lab human resources problems other than increased salary budgets? What are they?

How would a limited increase in salary budgets be most efficiently spent (e.g., more managerial positions, higher entry-level salaries?) Why?

What would you think about California having a statewide forensic science advisory body like New York or Virginia? Advantages? Disadvantages? Concerns?

Looking ahead, do you see any significant problems for government forensic science looming in the future? What are they? How can they be avoided? (Again, think big.)

One issue the Task Force may address is whether laboratory documents of various types could or should be made available to the public in electronic format, e.g., by being posted on the web. For each of the following types of documentation, please tell us (a) whether you think it would be practical or impractical to make it available in electronic format, and why; and (b) whether you think it would be a good idea or a bad idea to make it available to the public in electronic format, and why. The types of documents are:

- Protocols or Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's)
- Quality Control/Quality Assurance documents
- Proficiency test results
- Logs of unexpected results and/or corrective action files
- Audit reports
- Validation studies
- CV of laboratory analyst

Recently there has been discussion in forensic science journals of potential problems created by observer effects, context effects and confirmation bias. Are you familiar with these discussions? Has your laboratory instituted any measures or procedures for minimizing observer effects, context effects or confirmation bias? Do you plan to institute any such measures in the future?

There is a United States Supreme Court case called Brady v. Maryland that requires prosecutors to disclose certain types of information (sometimes called Brady materials) to criminal defendants. Are you familiar with the Brady case and what it requires? Have you and your employees been briefed on what types of information you should disclose to prosecutors so that prosecutors may meet their obligations under Brady? Do you have any specific rules or policies in place that deal with this issue?

What steps do you take to train analysts to testify in court? How do

you monitor their courtroom testimony?

What types of communication do you permit between your analysts and attorneys? Do you permit your analysts to speak by telephone with prosecutors? With defense lawyers? Do you permit analysts to meet in person with prosecutors? With defense lawyers? Are any limitations placed on attorney access to analysts?

Does your lab have a policy regarding defense expert requests to observe testing? If so, what is it?

Whether or not you have a formal policy, does your lab permit defense experts to use your facility to examine or analyze evidence?

Are there any survey answers you would like to expand on or explain? Please do so?